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AUTHOR Scott, Robert A.
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ABSTRACT

This speech discusses the development of a true undergraduate liberal education for the 21st century that is also global in scope. It argues that liberal education is failing in its goal to truly educate students. The mission of every college or university should be to advance students' knowledge, skills, abilities, and values for an international world, and to match means to expected outcomes. The focus should shift from teaching and prerequisites to student development and learning. Such a shift in focus means that students will be expected to have a greater commitment to their education, moving from being passive to active learners; that faculty must become facilitators of student learning rather than being the source of all knowledge; that learning should no longer be limited to the classroom but take place outside the classroom in extracurricular activities, including travel to foreign countries and the use of multimedia technologies; and that student testing and assessment must be utilized more in order to guide and monitor the pace of student learning and development. Charts are provided that explore the development of educational goals for individuals in the 21st century, what standards and forms of evaluation are needed, and the balance between specialized and general knowledge. (GLR)

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ED 362 139

A "Liberating" Education for the 21st Century

by

Dr. Robert A. Scott, President
Ramapo College of New Jersey

Introduction

This is a "work in progress." As we at Ramapo continue to advance our thinking about global education, and learn how much we still must do even as we accomplish more than we thought we could, I have come to think of a day when "international education" and "multicultural education" are each redundant. That is, I look forward to the day when all education is international and multicultural, when to say "education" is to mean "global."*

When thinking these thoughts about undergraduate education, I realize that we need to rethink what we mean by the term "liberal arts" and by the term "general education." Both terms are flawed. Neither is able to be truly global as currently conceived. Therefore, I have set my sights on developing a truly liberal education--an education for all students which liberates them from their provincial origins, no matter what their age, status, or ethnic, national, or racial group.

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* See "Campus Developments in response to the Challenges of Internationalization: The Case of Ramapo College of New Jersey (USA)," invited presentation at the 1992 General Conference, Programme on Institutional Management in Higher Education (IMHE) of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), Paris, France, September 2, 1992.

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The "Liberal Arts" Are Dead

The "Liberal Arts" are exhausted. The original ideas of language and reasoning, necessary ingredients for personal liberation, have been shortchanged by ignoring the sciences and by using introductory courses to discipline majors as general education. However, international, intercultural, experiential, and interdisciplinary education provide the foundation for a truly liberating education, the type advocated by various reformists and supported by those who have studied the benefits of a college education.*

Liberal education or liberal arts education has been attracting a great deal of media attention -- even editorials in The Wall Street Journal. The discussion concerns issues about "political correctness," the "canon," freedom of speech, cultural identity, and critical thinking about the purpose of undergraduate education.

Some of the media attention concerns the status of college teaching, what with the influence of student "careerism," the avoidance of courses in math, science, philosophy, and religion, the use of part-time faculty, the reliance on introductory courses to fulfill the grand goals expressed in mission statements and college catalogs, and the tendency toward over-specialization of undergraduate study.

I believe that one source of the confusion about the liberal arts and liberal education is that we have lost sight of their meaning and goals. If we are not clear about what we do and why, how can we expect journalists and politicians to be clear about our goals and courses?

First, "liberal arts major" is an oxymoron. A major by definition is specialized, a study in depth. Can it really provide a generally liberating experience? Only rarely.

Second, increasingly we have used "general education" requirements to fulfill our liberal arts goal. Yet these courses are usually "100-level preparations for mini-Phd's." While we articulate our goals well, our instruments for fulfillment are designed for another purpose.

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*See especially, Howard R. Bowen, Investment in Learning: The Individual and Social Value of American Higher Education. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1977.

Consider the goals for liberal or general education adopted by the Association of American Colleges (AAC). It states that the problem in American higher education "is that too many students do not possess the knowledge, skills, and personal qualities generally accepted as marks of an educated person."[1] The solution to the problem, according to the AAC, is to improve general education, which it defines as follows:

> ...the cultivation of the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that all of us use and live by during most of our lives--whether as parents, citizens, lovers, travelers, participants in the arts, leaders, volunteers, and good samaritans.[2]

These attributes of an educated person include:

- inquisitiveness
- abstract logical thinking
- critical analysis
- literacy, including writing, reading, speaking, listening
- understanding numerical data
- historical consciousness
- an understanding of science
- values
- art - an appreciation of beauty
- international and multicultural experience
- and, study in depth.[3]

But consider, in our most popular undergraduate majors, three-quarters of the students have fewer than two courses in math, including statistics; two-thirds have fewer than two courses in science; 93% have fewer than two courses in foreign language, and less than 1% have at least 10 academic credits in non-western culture or society. In fact, according to Clifford Adelman, in his excellent report, Tourists in Our Own Land, "...one out of five

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[1]Gaff, Jerry G. New Life for the College Curriculum: Assessing Achievements and Furthering Progress in the Reform of General Education. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1991, p.18.

[2]Task Group on General Education. A New Vitality in General Education. Washington, D.C.: Association of American Colleges, 1988, p.3.

[3]Association of American Colleges. Integrity in the College Curriculum. Washington, D.C., 1985.

bachelor's degree recipients--as well as over half of those who earned less than the bachelor's degree--in the NLS-72 (National Longitudinal Study of the High School Class of 1972) -- had no post-secondary exposure to Western cultural and social information at all, "introductory" or "advanced."[4]

Our students' courses of study are too specialized, too limited, and too "professional." I think we allowed things to get out of balance first by allowing knowledge and its organization to become more important than students and their development; by equating faculty rewards to rather simplistic notions of scholarship; by encouraging the humanities and social sciences to adopt the methods of science, and by focusing on faculty teaching rather than on student learning.

In an intellectual tour de force, Bruce Kimball explores the history of the idea of liberal education and the loss of balance between the ideals of the classical philosophers and those of the classical orators.[5] The tradition of these philosophers has come to dominate the curriculum -- hence the focus on more and more specialized knowledge and the often dogmatic thinking about the curriculum. In contrast, the tradition of the orators -- Cicero amount them -- is to focus on recreating "learning communities" as central to education. To them, "virtue is not in the text, but in what we the living make of them." Their tradition is to interpret and reinterpret what is known -- out loud -- among others. The orators gave special attention to language, text and tradition -- in an active, critical way.

Kimball's argument, of course, is that we must honor both traditions in balance, not one over the other. His focus on the philosophers and orators is reminiscent of the trivium and quadrivium--the original seven liberal arts organized into two groups--language and reasoning. It is interesting that although contemporary liberal education seems to have lost its way, the traditions of the ancients provide us with clues and the essential ingredients for individual freedom and liberty in any democracy at any time.

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[4]Adelman, Clifford. Tourists in Our Own Land: Cultural Literacies and the College Curriculum, U.S. Department of Education, Washington, D.C., pp.35,36,59,66-71.

[5]Kimball, Bruce A., Orators and Philosophers: A History of the Idea of Liberal Education. New York: Teachers College Press, 1986.

Therefore, I would return to these principles and formulate a "liberating" education based on mastery of language and reasoning. This education would help "liberate" students from their provincial origins and their limited view of humanity, including their own, without regard to age, station, or place, ethnic, national, or racial group. This liberation would be based on knowledge, skills, abilities, and values. Our focus on the international and intercultural, the interdisciplinary and the experiential, would support this goal. At Ramapo, we believe that our goal is to enhance the abilities of all of our students to learn and pursue truth on their own, as well as in groups, in an increasingly interdependent and intercultural world. To do this requires knowledge, skills, abilities, and values, including the ability to understand the "other," communicate with an "other," and understand that we all are the "other" at various times.*

The need for such understanding seems self-evident. It is highly likely that our graduates -- all of them -- either will supervise or be supervised by someone of a different ethnic, national, or racial background. It also is likely that the activities of their employers will be affected by suppliers, customers, or others who are of a different cultural background. In addition, it is likely that the neighbors of our graduates, or the schoolmates of their children, will be of a different heritage. That is, we expect that the lives of our graduates will be affected by our increasingly diverse society and interdependent world community. A simple review of economics and demographics makes this clear.

Therefore, the mission of every college or university should be to advance students' knowledge, skills, abilities, and values for this new world, to match means to expected outcomes. By "knowledge" we refer to the content of general and specialized education, including knowledge to the point of competency (however defined locally) of both one's own culture and a culture other than one's own, whether gained by formal instruction or by experience which is then assessed. In this way, students can learn about the commonalities between and among groups as well as the differences, just as the ancients did.

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* By "other," I do not mean either the "noble savage" or the barbarian," two stereotypes in literature and anthropology. I mean, simply, someone from a different background; not quite the "stranger," but this label is closer in meaning than the others. The understanding of "culture" also needs to be refined. By culture, we include religion and civilization, not just political ideology, economics, and government priorities.

By "skills," we refer to language, i.e. writing, listening, speech, and reading, as well as foreign languages, computation, and the use of computers and other technological tools. By "abilities," we refer to reasoning, formulating hypotheses, critical analysis, seeing connections between disparate events, ideas, and truths, which is the essence of interdisciplinarity, relating to others, imagining oneself as the "other" or imagining a problem in a totally new position, which is the foundation of "creativity," formulating alternative views, leadership, learning on one's own and in groups, and developing natural talents. These skills and abilities are enhanced by our approach to education. We seek to engage students in their studies, to assist in their transformation, not simply to encounter them in a series of transactions as we "deliver" instruction.

By "values," we refer to inquisitiveness, a commitment to learning, teamwork, ethics, discipline, a philosophy of service to others, involvement as a citizen, a balance between material and non-material goals, caring for others, empathy, tolerance, and respect for diversity. This preparation, together with advanced knowledge, skills, and ability, is necessary for citizenship and lifelong learning in an increasingly interdependent and intercultural world. It is verified by employers, and, in many important ways, by our own experience.

By using this approach to review the goals of a college education, as well as the strategies and activities available for success in the three major spheres of influence over which educators have at least some degree of control -- the curriculum, the campus, the community, we can plot goals, activities, progress, and future expectations, including the amount of time to be committed to each area.

In addition, by this approach we inevitably emphasize student development and learning over faculty teaching and prerequisites -- indeed, society over campus.

This change in focus has consequences for activities on a college campus. For students, it means greater expectations for their commitment to their own education, because students must become active learners instead of passive recipients. For faculty, it means giving up the role as source of all knowledge, and becoming more of a facilitator of student learning, with the resources necessary for this to occur.

The shift in approach to learning as opposed to teaching also has consequences for the capital budget and equipment. Under the new paradigm, learning is not limited to the classroom, but is organized to take place outside the classroom in extracurricular activities, in other physical locations, even in other countries, and electronically by means of telecommunications and teleconferencing. With an emphasis on learning, there also is a greater emphasis on the use of computing for self-paced instruction and for multimedia technologies to bring the power of audio, video, text, and sound to assignments in a managed method.

In addition, under the new arrangement, colleges would not have to purchase and maintain large-scale capital equipment and facilities for all programs, but could arrange for students to use and learn from these resources through off-campus connections. Collaborations between colleges, universities, and businesses can provide opportunities for students to learn by using the most up-to-date equipment off-campus, instead of expecting every college to maintain such major capital investments.

A focus on learning as opposed to teaching also can lead to new forms of collaboration between institutions of higher education and communities. Sports and recreation facilities can be viewed as resources for learning by anyone, and not strictly as tools for use by a limited number of students.

Student counseling also is affected by this shift in paradigm. The new focus will be on student development and on organizing activities and opportunities to enhance student learning, rather than on a set of services made available to students without regard to their true needs.

The shift from teaching to learning also has consequences for the assignment of students to classes, and for testing and assessment. Under the new paradigm, students of almost any acceptable level of preparation can be assigned appropriately because the learning environment is structured to meet their needs. However, a much greater emphasis must be given to testing and assessment in order to guide and monitor the pace of student learning and development.

Historically, the emphasis on teaching has focused on the transaction between teacher as fount of knowledge and the student as recipient. In this process, the individual student is tested to see if the transaction took place. With learning as the objective, we need to assess the degree to which "transformation" has taken place; i.e., the degree to which the student, or students working as a team, have been transformed by the experience and assisted in development to a new and higher level of independence and cooperation.

But what should a student know? What should be the qualities of a well-educated person in the year 2020? What standards and forms of evaluation should be employed? What should be the balance between specialized and general knowledge? How and where should students learn that which is valued?

To assist in our consideration of these questions, Chart I can be used as a tool of analysis.

CHART I

SPHERES OF INFLUENCE

EDUCATIONAL GOALS

	CURRICULUM	CAMPUS	COMMUNITY
Knowledge	General knowledge Expert or specialized knowledge Culture other than one's own	APPLICATION	
Skills	Languages Computation Using computers and other technological tools Ethnography	PRACTICE	
Abilities	Reasoning Formulating hypotheses Critical analysis Seeing connections Relating to others Imagining oneself as the "other" Creativity Leadership	PRACTICE	
Values	Inquisitiveness Commitment to learning Objectivity-acknowledge biases Teamwork Ethnics Discipline Service to others Involvement as a citizen Respect for diversity Tolerance	PRACTICE	

Plan ● Goals ● Evaluation

And how should they know it? Again, a model might help. See Chart II.

CHART II

SPHERES OF INFLUENCE

PILLARS OF DEVELOPMENT

Multi-Cultural International Experiential Interdisciplinary

CURRICULUM	CAMPUS	COMMUNITY
Integration of knowledge is what is "higher" about higher education (Harlan Cleveland)	Model U.N. Debate ICONS	Internships
Learning and student development is not limited to the classroom Active learning Put oneself in another's sandals	Clubs Communications	Fieldwork Internships Study abroad International coop Involvement
Education about the "global commons" (Harlan Cleveland); education for an increasingly inter-dependent and multicultural world	Visiting faculty International students	"Sister" states and cities Exchanges
"Political unity and cultural diversity" Study-experience the nearby as well as the exotics (which may be nearby)	Clubs Lecture series Staffing decisions Enrollment planning	Fieldwork Internships Involvement

Plan ● Goals ● Evaluation

The four pillars of development -- multicultural, international, experiential, and interdisciplinary -- are the foundations for action on the three major spheres of college influence for student learning -- curriculum, campus, and community. Chart II summarizes an approach to planning, setting goals, and evaluation.

As we think about these issues -- learning rather than only teaching, international and multicultural education, interdisciplinary as well as experiential approaches -- we begin to see a new construct for education, an education that can liberate the individual.

But this is not a finished work. There is more to do before these elements become central and not just "conference themes." To consider this next stage of development, I offer another model, which I invite you to help me complete. We can use this model to discuss what students need to know, how and where they can learn, and how to evaluate progress. This model can be used to express goals, chart progress, and set new objectives. See Chart III for a few ideas to begin the process.*

* For a complete review of Ramapo's progress, see "Campus Developments in Response to the Challenges of Internationalization: The Case of Ramapo College of New Jersey (USA)," op. cit.

CHART III

SPHERES OF INFLUENCE

PILLARS OF DEVELOPMENT

Multi-Cultural International Experiential Interdisciplinary

CURRICULUM	CAMPUS	COMMUNITY
Curriculum development Faculty development Emphasis on inquisitiveness and reflexive attitudes	Visiting Scholars Emphasis on the integration of learning for action	Cooperative education International coop
Cooperative education, both domestic and international	Emphasis on involvement - i.e. voluntary and paid community action	Emphasis on involvement- i.e. voluntary and paid community action Internships Fieldwork Study abroad
Technology as subject Technology as pedagogy	Closed circuit and cable TV	Bergen County Interactive Television (ITV) SERC (Satellite Education Resource Communications) Teleconferences - over 100 per year

Plan ● Goals ● Evaluation

These actions -- especially those related to inquisitiveness, or asking strategic as well as basic questions; the integration of knowledge and experience so as to acknowledge and use the interdisciplinary approach; and involvement as well as studying on campus and in the community -- the world beyond the campus -- all lead to the development of the independent or "liberated" individual, which is the goal of our education.

What ideas do you have?

Thank you.